

sion that have taken too much of the life-blood of this country already. Shortly before he died, the late Cardinal Bernardin, who Hillary and I had the privilege to know and revere, gave a remarkable speech about reconciling the conflicts within the Catholic Church over great issues in a way that would permit people to disagree honestly to try to preserve reconciliation. And he said this, knowing that his death was imminent: "It is wrong to waste the precious gift of time given to us on acrimony and division."

My fellow Americans, for all the problems of this country, we have been given more from God than any nation in history. And at this moment in history, we have more opportunities and more responsibilities than ever before. To make this democracy work, we must create a vital and dynamic center that is a place of action. We cannot waste the precious gift of this moment.

You have worked hard to create that vital center. Anchored by our oldest convictions, strengthened by our newest successes, certain of our national purpose, let us go forward from that center to build our bridge to the 21st century.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:50 p.m. at the Sheraton Washington Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Bernard Schwartz, event chairman; Gov. Roy Romer of Colorado; Al From, executive director, Democratic Leadership Council; and Mark Penn and Doug Schoen of Penn + Schoen Associates.

Message on the Observance of Christmas 1996

December 11, 1996

Warm greetings to everyone celebrating Christmas.

Each year during this blessed season, the world pauses to look back across the centuries to the birth of a Child. This Child was born to poor but loving parents in the small town of Bethlehem—born into a world where few noticed His coming, except for some simple shepherds and a few wise men. He was the Son of God and the King of Kings, but He chose to come among us as servant and Savior.

Though two thousand years have passed since Jesus first walked the earth, much remains the same. Today's world is still caught up in the challenges and cares of everyday existence, and too often we crowd God into the background of our experience. Too often we still ignore His loving presence in our lives and the precious gifts of peace and hope that He so freely offers to us all. And today, as on that first Christmas morning, He still reveals himself to the loving, the wise, and the simple of heart.

As we gather with family and friends again this year to celebrate Christmas, let us welcome God wholeheartedly into our daily lives. Let us learn to recognize Him not only in the faces of our loved ones, but also in the faces of those who, like Jesus, are familiar with poverty, hardship, and rejection. And let us be inspired by His example to serve one another with generous hearts and open hands. In this way we will approach the dawn of a new century and a new millennium confident in God's abundant grace and strengthened by His timeless promise of salvation.

Hillary joins me in praying that the peace and joy of this holiday season will remain with you throughout the coming year. Merry Christmas, and God bless you.

Bill Clinton

Message on the Observance of Kwanzaa 1996

December 11, 1996

Warm greetings to everyone celebrating Kwanzaa.

The hearts of millions of men and women across America and around the world rejoice as together we enter into the spirit of this uplifting holiday. The seven principles of Kwanzaa—unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith—teach us that when we come together to strengthen our families and communities and honor the lessons of the past, we can face the future with joy and optimism. Through prayer, song, and the exchange of gifts, Kwanzaa helps us celebrate the human experience and appreciate our many blessings.

Today, we have a renewed sense of hope in America, a hope based on the idea that our great diversity can unite—not divide—our society. As we rejoice in the rich cultural heritage of the African American community during Kwanzaa, let us work together to ensure that the meaning and energy of this inspiring festival will remain with us throughout the coming year, bringing courage, renewal, and even greater hope for the future.

Hillary joins me in sending best wishes for a wonderful holiday and every happiness in the year ahead.

Bill Clinton

Remarks on the Airline Safety Initiative and an Exchange With Reporters

December 12, 1996

The President. Thank you. Good morning. I will be very brief, but I do want to make a couple of remarks. I want to thank the Vice President, first of all, and the people who have worked with him for their unflagging efforts to improve airline safety. I want to thank Secretary Peña and Mr. Hall and Ms. Daschle and the other members of the administration who have worked on this.

I want to especially thank the airline executives who are here for announcing their plan to ensure that their U.S. carriers have smoke detectors in their cargo holds whenever they leave the ground. This is further proof of what we can achieve when we work together.

This is a critical part of our long-range plan to make Americans more secure and to make sure our skies are safer. After the TWA disaster, the Vice President's commission worked around the clock to develop an action plan for aviation safety. Just a month later, we made nearly every one of their recommendations the law of the land: state-of-the-art bomb detectors in our major airports, a dramatic increase in FBI agents assigned to counterterrorism efforts, background checks and FBI fingerprint checks for airport and airline employees, improved mail and cargo inspection, and more bomb-sniffing dogs.

I said in October that we cannot make the world risk-free, but we can reduce the risks

we face. By putting smoke detectors in every cargo hold of these carriers we take another step to make our people and our skies safer.

And again, let me say I congratulate especially the carriers who are here. I thank them for their leadership and for working with us, and I thank the members of the administration, beginning with the Vice President.

Thank you very much.

Director of Central Intelligence-Designate

Q. Mr. President, is Tony Lake in trouble, and will you go to the mat for him?

The President. No, and yes. [Laughter]

Q. You don't think he has any problem in terms of the—[inaudible].

The President. No. Well, we reviewed that, and I think—I believe the essential facts of the matter have been reported in the press. And the Counsel's Office and others reviewed the facts as they have been presented—I believe they have been accurately presented in the press, although I did not personally read the story this morning, and we believe that it is not a disqualification.

Balanced Budget and Protecting the Poor

Q. Mr. President, your embrace of the political center seems to concern many traditionally liberal Democrats who are afraid this priority of balancing the budget is going to hurt poor people. Yesterday the chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, Representative Donald Payne, was expressing this kind of concern. How do you guarantee that fuel for poor people, subsidies, that housing subsidies, that your determination to balance the budget is not going to come on the backs of the poor?

The President. Well, that's what we're working through right now. We've been working through that for the last 4 years. Every year in the last 4 years we've had to send a budget up to the Hill, and we've worked on a budget that would continue to reduce the deficit in a way that would be fair to all Americans.

And I would just say, first of all, there's some evidence here: After 4 years we've cut the deficit by 60 percent, there are 2.1 million fewer people on welfare and about a million fewer children in poverty than there